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ARGENTINA: Abortive Army Revolt

The failure of the attempt over the weekend by hardline Argentine III Corps Commander Menendez to oust moderate Army chief Viola should strengthen President Videla's hand in dealing with remaining hardline opponents of his government's policies. Viola--heir apparent to the presidency--undoubtedly was chosen as the target for the revolt because of his staunch support of Videla. 3.5(c)

The bloodless revolt, which began early Saturday morning with a demand for Viola's resignation, apparently was triggered by the release and deportation last week of former *La Opinion* newspaper publisher Jacobo Timerman. The decision to free Timerman, who was viewed by the hardliners as a close collaborator with Argentina's once powerful leftist guerrilla movement, reportedly had sharply increased frictions in the military hierarchy. 3.5(c)

Menendez and other members of his faction, who have accused Videla and Viola of being "soft" on subversion, opposed the government's invitation last month to an Organization of American States mission to investigate widespread human rights violations. They also have bitterly attacked Videla's decision to pursue a negotiated settlement to the Beagle Channel conflict with Chile and have been constant critics of the government's economic policies. 3.5(c)

It is not yet clear how strongly the government will press its advantage in the wake of the failed revolt. Menendez has been relieved of his command, but no punishment has been set. His forced retirement seems a certainty. General Viola has scored a sizable moral victory and a formal court martial for Menendez could signal a general house-cleaning of hardline opponents within the military. 3.5(c)

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